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THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CANONICAL IDEA

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Much attention has been given to the history of the formation of the Canon of Scriptures. But the idea of canonicity which has dominated theology for centuries has in recent times been modified or even abandoned. This is necessary if we are to appreciate the modern estimate of the authority of Scripture. A leading dogmatician of the nineteenth century defined canonicity as including three requirements: authenticity, trustworthiness, and integrity, and then added: a criticism which loves truth will find these three requirements fulfilled if not totally, yet essentially. This shows how unsatisfying and insufficient the present position is: it is a half-way measure. Faith wants a full, unconditioned authority, not to be disputed in any way by criticism. And criticism does not allow any limits to be set by other needs or reflections. There is no such thing as a "sound criticism," if by this one understands a dogmatically correct criticism. Criticism is sound when it follows nothing but its own rules and does this thoroughly. To trace the process by which the idea of canonicity has been discredited is the purpose of this article.

I

Before taking up the real subject of this paper, let us remind ourselves of a few notable features in the making of the Canon.

1. Canon means "rule"; it is a dogmatic term. Like apostolicity, apostolic succession, and so on, canonicity is a notion belonging to the so-called early catholic system of sureties for the true doctrine.

Of course Th. Zahn has gathered a large amount of evidence that "canon" may mean "list"; he thinks—and others agree—that he has proved that in connection with the Scriptures it always had this meaning and that *κανονίζειν* did not mean "declare to be authoritative," but meant "put in the list of Scriptures to be

read in the congregation." In other words, the question becomes a liturgical one, not a dogmatic one, and would lead us back to the first century instead of to the end of the second; the Canon would be apostolic in fact, not catholic.

Granted even that some Fathers in the fourth century used *κανονίζειν* or *κανονικός* in the sense of "put in the list of books to be read in church," this does not prove that *κανών* had this meaning from the beginning. The early expression, *ὁ κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας*, is not to be translated by "the list of truth." Tertullian in speaking of *scripturarum regula* (*Adv. Marc.*, iii, 17) is likely to give the exact rendering of *ὁ κανὼν τῶν θεῶν γραφῶν*. The ante-Nicene Fathers use *κανὼν* almost always in the sense of rule, be it rule of faith or rule of conduct. It is evident, therefore, that the same development took place here as with *διαθήκη*; something spiritual was turned into something literary; as the old and new covenants came to signify the book dealing with these covenants, so the rule or norm became the current expression for the normative book, ruling the faith and life of Christianity. Isidor of Pelusium (†440) exactly expresses the situation by saying (*Epist. lib.*, iv, 114): *ὁ κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας, τὰς θείας φημι γραφάς*. There was and had always been in Christianity a rule of truth, undefined and yet known to every Christian.

2. This now had become identified with the Holy Scriptures. At the beginning the authority of Christianity had been "the Lord." By this is meant, in the first instance, the sayings of Jesus, to which, according to Paul, an unlimited and indisputable authority was given (I Cor. 7:10, 12, 25; cf. Mark 13:31). It was the Lord, too, who had inspired the prophets of old and who was speaking in the Christian apostles and prophets. The Lord was a spiritual authority, and so were apostles and prophets. But before long books took their places and the authority was attached to the Gospels as representing the Lord, giving his sayings as well as his deeds, and to the acts and letters of the apostles, and to the prophetic books of revelation. The authority is thus transferred from personalities to literature.

The process is the most conspicuous in the case of Marcion whom I believe to be the very father of the New Testament Canon.

Christianity had inherited and so possessed from the beginning the Old Testament as a sacred book invested with divine authority. Marcion did away with this, and so felt bound to provide a substitute: for a sacred book was what mankind wanted at that period. So Marcion for his "reformed Pauline Church" (144 A.D.) created a Bible combining one Gospel and ten Pauline Letters and called these two parts "the Lord" and "the apostle," exactly as Christianity hitherto had named its spiritual authorities. In the fourth century some Marcionites understood that Jesus had written the Gospel as Paul wrote the Epistles (Adamantius, *Dial.*, II, 13, p. 84, Van de Sande Bakhuyzen). As a kind of introduction they put before the two parts Marcion's own *Antitheses*, and probably they added peculiar books of Marcionitic psalms and revelations, in this way approaching the form of the Catholic Bible.

The Catholic church, for its part, accepted the idea of a New Testament Canon, putting this by the side of its Old Testament and adding to the four Gospels and the thirteen Letters of Paul writings of other apostles (i.e., Acts, Catholic Epistles, and revelations), in order to have a Catholic Bible, not merely a particularly Pauline one. At the same time it introduced a much more important change by making apostolicity the test of canonicity. This was the natural consequence of attributing the authority to literature instead of to personality. The Lord had not written anything: on this all agreed; the apostles had written. As long as the emphasis was laid on the content, it was natural to say that the Lord had inspired the apostles. Now for the written book it was equally natural to derive its authority from the apostles. Even the Gospels were thought of, not so much as representing the Lord, as being written by apostles or under apostolic direction.² This

² For Mark's and Luke's Gospels was claimed the authority of Peter and Paul respectively. It is remarkable how tradition tries to confirm this claim by historical statements: when Tertullian says (*Adv. Marc.*, iv, 5): *Marcus quod edidit Petri affirmetur*, this is a purely dogmatic statement. His contemporary Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, iii, 1) knows that Mark wrote after the death of the apostles. Clement of Alexandria (*Hypot.* vi apud Euseb., *H.E.*, vi, 14) says that Peter was still alive but did not take notice of Mark's writing. Eusebius (*H.E.*, ii, 15) knows that Peter, by a special revelation of the Holy Spirit, approved of it; Epiphanius (*Haer.*, li, 6) that he ordered Mark to write it. Origen already had it from tradition that Mark wrote under Peter's

notion of apostolicity fitted admirably into the Catholic system and so soon became the leading one: whatsoever was to be recognized as authoritative had to be apostolic in origin, and what was apostolic had a claim to canonicity.

3. From the beginning there had been degrees of authority. The Lord was more than the apostle; a letter of Paul was appreciated more than an anonymous epistle. The notion of canonicity was opposed to this: whatever was canonical ought to be of equal authority. But it took time to realize this: at the beginning even the notion of canonicity was fluid. Beside Scriptures of undoubted authority stand others of less importance. In the case of the early Fathers of about 200 A.D. it is often difficult to say whether they use a certain book as canonical, i.e., of equal authority with the four Gospels and the Letters of Paul, or not. It is different with the next generation: Hippolytus differs in this respect from Irenaeus, Novatian from Hippolytus, Cyprian from Tertullian, and Origen from his teacher Clement of Alexandria. The ecclesiastical tradition has become stronger; the limits of the Canon have been traced more strictly.

And yet Origen and his school still maintained a gradation of values in the New Testament. With Origen it is literary criticism which leads him to distinguish between "genuine, spurious, and mixed" (i.e., interpolated); Eusebius, too, has three classes, but with him it is the ecclesiastical recognition which marks the difference between "generally acknowledged, partly opposed, and rejected." It is the scholar Eusebius who makes this classification. Eusebius the churchman would prefer another one, allowing only for a very simple partition; canonical and non-canonical books. This is what we find when we look more closely into his canonical list as given in *H.E.*, iii, 25: he wishes to do away with the middle class by including the five books, which he mentions first viz., five of the so-called Catholic Epistles, in the number of canonical books, while rejecting the five others

supervision, and with Jerome (*Epist. cxx ad reditiam*, c, 11) this became a dictation of Peter: now one could say in reality that it was Peter's Gospel, and apostolic in the full sense. Cf. my *Kerygma Petri*, ("Texte und Untersuchungen," XI, 1, 1893), pp. 71 f.

(viz., *Acta Pauli*, *Pastor*, *Rev. Petri*, *Barnabae epist.*, *Didache*) as spurious.¹

The tendency toward equalizing, which we found inherent in the notion of canonicity, comes out most clearly with Athanasius, the great churchman and ecclesiastical leader, who did not care much about scholarly learning and criticism, but was enthusiastic about maintaining the catholic faith against all sorts of heretics. In his thirty-ninth festival letter of 367 A.D., directed against the Meletians, he develops the notion of canonicity to its full meaning: the books of the Bible are fixed in number as well as in order; all are of equal authority; for a book is either apostolic, and therefore canonical, or it is not; and as apostolicity for a non-apostolic book is for the most part claimed by heretics, "non-apostolic" does not merely mean non-canonical, but also means heretical, dangerous, to be avoided. With Athanasius there is no question that all seven Catholic Epistles belong in the New Testament, and so does Revelation; and at the same time it is without question that books like the Acts of Paul or the Revelation of Peter do not belong to the Canon. It is a concession made to the catechetical usage of the church, when Athanasius allows *Didache* and *Pastor* together with five Old Testament apocrypha to form a special class of books to be read for the catechumens. One is tempted to compare this class of "Anaginoscomena" with Eusebius' middle class of "Antilegomena"; the difference, however, is that with Eusebius this class belongs to the Canon, although of inferior authority, while with Athanasius it is distinctly separated from the Canon and has no dogmatical authority at all.

In fixing the notion of canonicity and in standardizing the list Athanasius probably was guided by Western tradition. The Greek church continued to keep alive the former traditions: as late as the sixth and ninth centuries we find lists of canonical books making a distinction between first- and second-class canonicity.²

¹ Eusebius' inconsistency is most conspicuous in the case of the Revelation of John, which he mentions twice: viz., a first time at the end of the *Homologumena*, and a second time after the second pentas of the second class. This means in part including in or excluding it from the Canon.

² The so-called list of 60 books has outside of the 60 canonical books 9 Old Testament books (which we now call Apocrypha) distinguished from what it calls Apocrypha; and the stichometry inserted in the second edition of the Chronography of Patriarch

The Latin church for its part had from a very early time a Canon of homogeneous character and equal value in all its parts.

4. The *notion* of the Canon as a collection of apostolic writings endowed with infallible authority in all matters of faith and conduct was current from about 200 A.D. The Canon itself was not complete until the fourth century, or, to speak more exactly, was never absolutely determined. From the beginning the process of collecting had been accompanied by a process of shifting in content. The Roman church about 200 A.D. had some books in its New Testament (as represented by the so-called Muratorian Canon) which were dropped from it later and it lacked others which were taken in during the third century. Certain books never had a specifically defined position in the Canon. The Syrian church had only two or three of the Catholic Epistles and the Greek Fathers knew this and acknowledged the fact without being disturbed in their faith. In the West, Hebrews was not recognized as apostolic and canonical before the middle of the fourth century. The Muratorian Canon mentions three books of revelations: one, the Shepherd of Hermas, is rejected by the author of this list himself; another, the revelation of Peter, disappeared from the Canon between Clement and Origen; and the third, the Revelation of John, was stigmatized for its criticism by the school of Origen (Dionysius of Alexandria, etc.). It maintained its position in the West, but never received full recognition in the East.¹ Roughly speaking, the New Testament contained, according to the Syrians, 21 or 22 books, to the Greeks 26, and to the Latins 27. It is remark-

Nicephorus enumerates for both Testaments canonical books, Antilegomena, and Apocrypha. Even more significant is the distinction made in the Nisibene school (cf. Junilius Africanus, *De partibus divinae legis*, i, 7): *quaedam perfectae auctoritatis sunt, quaedam mediae, quaedam nullius; perfectae, quae canonica in singulis speciebus absoluti numeravimus; mediae, quae adjungi a plurimis diximus; nullius, reliqua omnia.*

¹ According to Professor C. R. Gregory's most recent list, we know of more than 2,200 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament: 50 only contain the whole New Testament, including Revelation; 62 the second part, i.e., Acts, Pauline and Catholic Epistles, and Revelation, with no Gospels; 8 give Revelation together with the Gospels, 8 with the Pauline Letters, 3 with Acts. This makes a total of 131 manuscripts giving Revelation in connection with canonical books, while in addition to this 86 manuscripts contain Revelation either by itself or in combination with the non-canonical writings. That is, we have 217 manuscripts of Revelation (to compare with 2,700 of the Gospels); and of these only three-fifths include it in the Canon, and these are most of them very late.

able that these differences were not among the complaints made by the churches against one another. The theologians knew of them but were indifferent to them as long as the *notion* of canonicity was not affected. The synod of 692 in its records indorsed six different lists of canonical books, giving to all the same sanction.

It is important to keep in mind that all through the Middle Ages the learned doubts and critical remarks of the early Fathers were known, as they were transmitted not only in Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' church history, but also in the prologues incorporated in the Bible manuscripts. This knowledge, however, was ineffective as long as traditionalism and scholasticism prevailed. On the other hand, the later centuries of the Middle Ages were willing to enlarge their New Testament by admitting into it some apocryphal writings: e.g., the so-called Gospel of Nicodemus and the Letter to the Laodiceans are found in quite a number of Bible manuscripts, and not merely in those of heretical origin.

II

Now we come to our real subject, i.e., the breaking of the Canon. The history of the church from the sixteenth century on is much more complicated than before; we must follow several diverging lines; but we shall find that they all tend toward the same end, viz., to disestablish the old notion of the Canon. The development of the first four centuries is repeated again, but in the opposite direction. In Roman Catholicism the importance of the Canon is limited, if not annulled, by making the rule of faith and conduct to be ecclesiastical tradition or papal infallibility; in Humanism the uniform authority is given up by returning to the scholarly distinctions of the third and four centuries; by Luther the authority once more is taken away from the books and given over to personalities. All this happens simultaneously and by mutual influence, but it represents, so to speak, steps backward from the fourth to the third and from the second to the first centuries.

1. Roman Catholicism claims to be the genuine continuation of mediaeval Christianity: but in fact it is different, being at the same time narrower and more developed. At the first glance it looks like a continuation of the early catholic scheme when, at the

Council of Trent, in the fourth session, April 8, 1546, in the *decretum de canonicis scripturis*, it was established as the doctrine of the church that all the books of the Old and the New Testaments, including every part of them, were to be held as inspired and canonical, i.e., authoritative in matter of doctrine and life, and that they were all of equal value and to be held in the same honor. Unity of the Canon was what the church had aimed at since the time of Athanasius. The list of canonical books accepted in this decree was the one given by Pope Innocent in 405 A.D. or the list of the Gelasian decree. A second *decretum de editione et uru sacrorum librorum* ordered that the Vulgate was to be the authentic edition, the official Bible, on which all argumentation had to be based (there was of course no Vulgate properly issued until the editions of Pope Sixtus V and Clement VII, 1590 and 1592). Thus declaring solemnly the canonicity and publishing a fixed list of the canonical books, the Council of Trent went on in the direction given by the mediaeval tradition, excluding at the same time all variations by creating uniformity, a process made possible only by the newly invented art of printing.

But at the same time the Council of Trent did much to weaken the idea of canonicity by adding two more principles, one in each decree. In the first, oral tradition is put with the Canon of Holy Scriptures and invested with equal authority. By means of this one may not only add everything he likes to the doctrine contained in the Scriptures, but he is able to modify this very doctrine by traditions to the contrary. This principle was not quite new; as early as 434 we find oral tradition alongside canonical doctrine in Vincent of Lerius, *Commonitionium*, ii, 1. But the explicit declaration of equal value was new. Likewise the principle proclaimed in the second decree, viz., that the Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted according to the doctrine of the church was not new: this had always been Catholic tradition. But it meant a further limitation of the significance of the Canon, that the right of interpretation here was given exclusively to the ecclesiastical authority. The Council established that there is a Canon and that it is to be honored equally in all its parts—however, not, what you read in it, but what the church says is contained in it is

authoritative. In other words, the authority of the Canon is but decorative. All depends on the authority of the church, which settles the questions of what is in the Canon, which books, which sense! The Canon is fully established by the Tridentine decree, and at the same time the notion of canonicity is weakened, if not abandoned.

The Vatican Council of 1870 makes this still more evident when, after repeating in the third session, April, 27, in the *Constitutio de fide catholica*, chap. 2, *de revelatione*, the declaration of Trent, it proclaimed in the next session, July 18, *Constitutio de ecclesia*, chap. 4, *de Romani Pontificis infallibili magisterio*, the Pope's infallible authority in all matters of doctrine. Now, when one has any difficulty in making out what is the truth, he would be a fool if he took the risk of searching in the Canon of Holy Scriptures: it is much easier and safer to apply for information to the Roman congregation representing the Pope's infallible *magisterium*. The Pope is the Canon. That is the end of it. The Canon of Holy Scriptures is still kept as a sacred relic—I mean to say, the church has not only the Bible, but it has it invested with all canonical authority. In practice, however, this has become quite insignificant and obsolete.

This is in reality the abandonment of the canonical idea in Roman Catholicism.

2. Humanism takes an intermediate position between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; it is a critical movement among the scholars, breaking with scholasticism but with no religious power for an ecclesiastical reconstruction. It started from the fall of Constantinople and the emigration of Greek scholars to Italy; it was greatly helped by Gutenberg's invention. Its main feature was the Renaissance, the rediscovering of the ancient world of classicism. A new mankind was born, shaking off the yoke of ecclesiastical authority and mediaeval tradition, maintaining the rights of the individual and much inclined to break off all historical continuity, putting aside the dark centuries and going back to the ancient civilization. Italy came near to a restoration of paganism, and France was likely to follow, while English and German Humanism was more religious and conservative. Here the catchword "back to the sources" was applied to Christianity

as well as to arts and letters. The German Humanists read and published the Fathers as well as the classics. Erasmus brought out the New Testament in the original Greek and Reuchlin taught Hebrew. At the same time the literary criticism revived: Laurentius Valla questioned the historicity of the *Donatio Constantini*. Erasmus and others renewed the criticism of the New Testament Antilegomena, as they found it in Eusebius and Hieronymus. What had been before merely dead learning became with the pupils of Erasmus a prominent critical principle: one has to discern between the several books in the New Testament Canon according to their different value. This is stated in the clearest fashion by Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt in his *Libellus de canonicis scripturis*, issued in 1520 and reprinted by Karl August Credner in *Zur Geschichte des Kanons*, 1847, pp. 291-412. Carlstadt wishes to prove that there is a gradation of values in the Canon and that there is no use in accumulating proof-texts from all parts of the Scriptures as if they all had the same weight, whereas they are in fact different in authority as well as in importance. Emphasizing the authority of the Holy Scriptures against oral tradition and ecclesiastical ordinances, Carlstadt compares the Canon of Augustine with that of Jerome in order to make out how much is established and what is doubtful. Against the subjectivism, as he calls Luther's treatment of James's Letter, he argues that one has to follow the statements made by the Fathers, and so he comes to distinguish three classes of Scripture writings, the first containing the five Books of Moses and the four Gospels; the second, the eight Books of the Prophets and thirteen Letters of Paul together with I Peter and I John; the third containing the hagiographa of the Old Testament, and the rest of the New Testament, i.e., what he calls the *Catholica anonyma*.

This goes against the Latin tradition; it is opposed to the tendency of Athanasius: it shakes the notion of canonicity at a vital point, denying its unity and uniformity. The church was asked to go back to the time of Eusebius, or rather of Origen. But the church did not accept this humanistic proposal. We have seen already that the Council of Trent insisted upon the unity of value and doctrine for the whole of the Bible and all its parts.

3. Literary criticism has in itself no strength. It was Luther's faith which gave him power, not only to construct a new church, but to establish a new principle which was to overthrow the notion of canonicity. When using his involuntary retirement at the Wartburg in 1521-22 for translating the New Testament from the original Greek into German, he added short prefaces to the whole New Testament and to the individual books. In doing so he did but follow an old usage—almost all Bible manuscripts have short prologues. But Luther's prefaces represented a new type. He did not repeat the traditional data in regard to author, date, occasion of the writing, and so on. He gave his impressions from and his appreciation of the book. It was indeed, as Carlstadt complained, mere subjectivism, but it was subjectivism of the loftiest kind. It was criticism from the point of view of faith. To know about the author of a certain book seemed unimportant to Luther compared with the question, whether one can find in it what his soul is looking for, namely, assurance of salvation. This is given in Christ, and so he introduces the principle of judging every book according to its contents: what preaches Christ is apostolic, and what does not preach Christ is not apostolic. Here apostolic is meant simply as a mark of authority—Luther could have just as well said divine or canonical. It has nothing to do with the literary question of apostolic authorship, at least in principle, since Luther expressly states that what does not preach Christ is not apostolic even if said by Peter and Paul, and, again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if it was issued by men like Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod.

This theory abandons the notion of canonicity far more effectually than the criticism of the Humanists does. All literary questions are declined; Luther is not concerned with the books, but with their contents. Instead of going back from Athanasius to Eusebius, from late to early catholicism, he goes straight back to the first century, to the personal authority of Christ in his Gospel and to that of the Holy Spirit in the apostles. It is not because it is written in an apostolic book that anything must be accepted as the true doctrine: it is by virtue of the experience of faith finding in it assurance of salvation that it is valued as apostolic, i.e.,

authoritative. To be sure, this is subjectivism, but it is the most effective and impressive subjectivism, if faith is living and strong.

New ideas need time to work themselves out, and the more ingenious they are, the longer the time. Great men always are ahead of their time. Luther anticipated by centuries the developments of the future; he even overran himself. He was not prepared to keep to his own principle, nor could others do so at his time.

In the usual way of speaking, "apostolic" meant apostolic authorship. It was but natural that Luther, in the same edition of 1522 insisted on apostolic authorship in the case of those books which he appreciated as authoritative, and that he denied apostolic authorship to those books which he thought not worth being apostolic. This was his verdict in regard to Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. In the list of books prefixed to the first edition of his New Testament he numbered the separate writings from Matthew to III John from 1 to 23, but in doing so gave no numbers to the four books just mentioned. He did not dare to exclude them altogether from the New Testament, as he was not bold enough to impose his individual opinion upon other people; but he marked clearly the line of distinction which he drew between them. This line is almost as sharp as the other line in the Old Testament between the canonical books and what he called Apocrypha, i.e., books to be read, but not books upon which to build arguments of authority and value.

In making this distinction Luther was guided by his personal appreciation of the books. But he surely had in mind also the early Christian tradition. Thus he came to shake hands with Erasmus and Carlstadt. And then, when the fight began with the enthusiasts (*Schwarmgeister*) who declined the scriptural authority altogether, relying on their inward enlightenment or inspiration, Luther relied more and more upon what he felt to be the sure basis of faith: maintaining historical revelation against mystical fancies, he put his finger upon the written letter of the sacred book. In this he was even stricter than Catholicism had been; for Catholicism always had a means of escaping by the subway of allegorical interpretation. Luther and Protestantism had not, as they stood for the plain literal sense of the Scriptures. This is the tragedy in

Luther's life: beginning in the spirit, he was brought by his opponents to end with the letter.

Now, if Luther did so, we are not surprised to see his followers do the same. The Gnesio-Lutherans felt it their duty to keep to Luther's distinction of what they called in a scholastic way proto- and deuterocanonical books. In doing so, however, they unconsciously followed Carlstadt more than Luther, arguing from historical tradition more than from judgment of faith. Once more the notion of canonicity made itself effective by leveling all gradations. As time went on the distinction between proto- and deuterocanonical books slipped away; the unity of the Canon, canonicity in its sharpest form, kept the field. Lutheranism conformed itself to Calvinism in this domain, keen as it was in opposing it in other questions.

4. It is remarkable that Calvinistic theology from the beginning had followed a different path. Already the Zurich reformers were biblical in a stricter sense than the Wittenberg men, keeping more closely to the letter of the Holy Scriptures than the latter did—in theory. And Calvin was a biblical scholar in the fullest sense. His *Institutio* in its editions ever increasing in size betrayed clearly the influence of biblical studies upon the author's mind: what he found in his Bible he felt bound to bring into his system. The formal authority of the Canon as the total of inspired books has never been emphasized so much as in Calvinistic theology. The Lutheran creeds praise the Holy Scripture as the unique source of the doctrine of salvation, but they never say which books are to be reckoned as Holy Scripture. The Calvinistic creeds give, most of them, lists of the canonical books—exactly as the Council of Trent did, with this difference, however, that they exclude whatever is called apocryphal, fixing the limits of canonicity as narrowly as possible. Luther could say that Melancthon's *Loci* were worthy to be included in the Canon; he could add his own prefaces to the Bible: Calvinistic Puritanism would not allow for either.

Canonicity never was thought of so highly as in the orthodox theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet its time was over. Pietism lacked interest in dogma: the Bible was to be

read in pious devotion for individual edification: that is a point of view alien from the notion of canonicity, which insists on the ecclesiastical dogma. Rationalism claimed the right of criticizing the Canon freely, i.e., the canonicity of every book.¹ Not the Antilegomena only, but almost all books of the New Testament were put on trial for being spurious, non-apostolic, and therefore non-canonical. Criticism, going too far, corrected itself by further progress. But there remained the fact that the canonical books are to be dealt with on the same principles as all other literature, and that dogmatic authority cannot be based upon historical origin which may be questioned at every moment.

Historical criticism and interpretation have done a splendid work in the nineteenth century. It is simply wonderful what results have been achieved in this domain by the united energy of scholars. At present our task is to bring the doctrine regarding the Bible to the same level. In doing this we must renounce forever the old notion of canonicity. This notion belongs to the old Catholic system, which tried to give securities for salvation in apostolic doctrine and apostolic tradition and apostolic succession and apostolic constitution. We are not going back to this nor rebuilding a system of accurate doctrine. We are longing for life, eternal life, personal life. Experience tells us that we can get this life in the Bible and nowhere else. It is Christ who has brought this life to mankind and it is the Bible which gives testimony to him: the Old Testament affording the indispensable premises; the Gospels bringing Christ himself before us in his words and deeds; the apostolic writings echoing it by their combined testimony. It is the whole Bible and every part of it which can be used in this way; but not a single word has authority merely because it is found in the Bible. The Bible is not an inspired textbook of natural science or of history or of politics, or of economy, nor even of theology or ethics. It is a book of faith and devotion. By reading in it and praying, one will find life everlasting and moral strength.

We do not diminish the authority of the Bible by casting away the notion of canonicity: on the contrary we establish it at its proper place.

¹T. T. Semler, *Von freier Untersuchung des Canons*, 1771-1775.